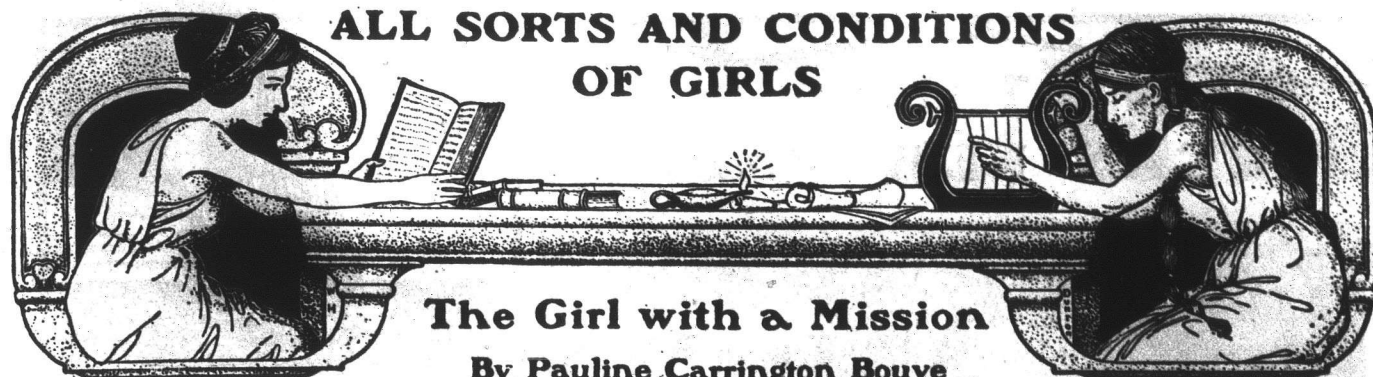




ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF GIRLS

The Girl with a Mission

By Pauline Carrington Bouve

Once upon a time a very brilliant man was discussing with me one of Mrs. Humphrey Ward's novels, and in the course of conversation he remarked: "A good woman, my dear young lady, can make more misery in a home than any other sort of a woman."

I remember I was very much shocked by this remark of my literary cynic, but during the years that have intervened since then I have found a certain amount of truth underlying his flippant and apparently unjust assertion. My cynical companion was a man of the world, who had read much and seen more. He was, however, a man of what people vaguely describe as having had "unfortunate domestic relations," and it was a reasonable conjecture that he entertained a somewhat jaundiced view of the domestic side of life, and that his judgment of women and homes was by no means a reliable standard.

Acquaintance at close range with "all sorts and conditions" of women, as well as girls, however, gradually brought me to this conclusion; that had my friend of the caustic tongue said, "a certain kind of good woman, my dear young lady, can make more misery in a home than any other kind," he would have been not very far from the truth. This modification would have covered that class of women of whom the "girl with a mission" is the promise and forerunner.

The kind mentioned represents the hard-good women, who have established a sort of Ethical Bureau, wherein moral, social and domestic delinquencies must be submitted to their censorship and judgment. It is this type of woman who constitutes herself a sort of family providence, whose special functions are the punishing and remitting of sins. How often one hears one of these self-selected dispensers of fate decree that certain members of her family or social set whom she regards with disapproval, "ought to suffer and be made to suffer," for such and such sins of omission and commission. Extenuating circumstances are coldly dismissed at her door and in her dwelling the pleas of temperamental weakness and inherited tendencies find no crack or crevice in which to lodge.

The "hard-good" woman, has set a high mark for herself as well as for others. She is rigid in the performance of what she considers her duty, she is inexorable in her judgment of her neighbors who fall short of doing what she decides is theirs. For her, there is no middle ground between what she calls good and evil, but she insists upon classifying each, not only for herself but for everybody else.

Two dignified, prosperous-looking, middle-aged gentlewomen were talking together in the waiting room of the Back Bay Station the other day and fragments of their conversation floated above the roar of the out-going and incoming trains below stairs.

"How are Jack and Mary getting on?" inquired one of the other.

"They are having a very hard time, I hear," was the reply. "Mary knew he had nothing, when she married him, so she has no right to complain."

"But Jack's indolent, you know, and the whole burden has fallen on her. She had really supported the whole menage with her designs and illustrations. She is exceedingly clever, they say, and willing to do more than her share."

The lines of the first speaker's face deepened as she said: "That may be very true, but she is very foolish and it is quite right that she should suffer for her folly. She has made her bed

and must lie upon it," and the speaker settled the bow under her chin with resolute fingers.

"Have you seen the baby?" inquired the questioner who evidently had a secret appreciation of "Mary's" difficulties. "No," was the slow but incisive reply. "I told them in the beginning what I thought. Of course, I consider Jack is behaving badly, but Mary should have been wiser. Poor people have no right to burden themselves with children, and if they do, they should not expect friends and relatives to share their burdens. I should feel that I were doing wrong if I were to allow myself to do anything that might encourage such rashness as theirs. Besides, the suffering and hardship will be good training."

"Next train for Dedham," shouted the railroad official in a stentorian voice and the matrons gathered up their shawls and bags and made their way toward the lift.

"Twenty years ago," I said to myself reflectively, "that woman was a girl with a mission, I'd bet a five-dollar gold piece on that—if I had one!"

It may seem a far cry between the girl with the mission (or rather the girl who tells you she has one), and the "hard-good woman," but the links from one to the other are not difficult to trace.

The first link in the chain connecting the two is the "one idea" link, and the last is the "crystallized self esteem" link.

These thoughts were floating around in my head as I sauntered into a nearby restaurant and ordered my modest mid-day meal.

I was counting the squares of maple sugar built up in pigmy pyramids on dinner plates set in the showcase window, when two smartly gowned maidens came in and sat down at my table. There was an air of importance in the way they drew off their gloves and set their parasols against their chair backs, that suggested affairs of import under consideration.

"Have you actually made up your mind to go? I mean, don't you feel shaky about it now and then?" asked my pink-waisted *vis-a-vis*, a scarcely suppressed tone of awe in her voice.

"No," replied the girl in the navy blue shirt-waist suit. "I have thought the matter over carefully and I feel that it is my duty to go."

"Y-e-s, I suppose so," was the doubtful rejoinder. "But I was just thinking, Alicia, what will your Aunt Sophia do without you? You know she's had you since you were a baby and you are about all she has left in the world. Won't she miss you dreadfully?"

"Aunt Sophia will do just what all

the other women in the world have done before," answered Alicia; she smiled calmly as she spoke and the expression of supreme and imperturbable self-assurance reminded me curiously of a smiling Buddha I had lately seen in a Japanese Art store down town. "She realizes, Mabel, as I do," continued the young lady, "that the individual must be sacrificed for the good of the masses and she is too noble to let trivial personal feeling interfere with the fulfillment of my appointed work in life."

"Appointed, yes, but appointed by whom?" questioned Mabel, who appeared to have imbibed new courage with her Oolong tea.

"Why, my natural tastes, my gifts, such as they are, my desire to be of use in the world, my spiritual aspirations—what the bishop calls my natural equipment, for such work. Can't you understand, Mabel dear, that I am not quite like other girls because I have a mission!"

"Yes, but there are so many things to do at home," objected Mabel. "Of course it would be nice to travel and see foreign lands and all that, but China is so far off and just think what an awful time Helen Stone had out there. Besides, the people out there don't want you, you know."

"If I allowed such ignoble considera-

Service for the last six months." And Mabel rose up and called for checks with a flush on her pretty face that was not all due to the temperature of the room.

Here was a case just in line with my theories and my reflections. Here was a "girl with a mission" who would certainly, if she were not demurred by the Boxers, swell the list of "hard-good women" in due season.

But there are a great many other sorts of girls who fancy they have (perhaps sometimes really have) other sorts of missions. The girl who tells you she has a mission, is nine times out of ten the girl who is not very anxious to do the ready-made duties that come to hand day-by-day—those work-a-day duties that are not mixed up with picturesque effects, nor high-flown sentiment, nor any sort of romance.

Among the various kinds of girls and their various "missions" there is the girl who believes it is her mission to convert young men from the error of their ways. This involves a good deal of church-going on balmy Sabbath mornings or quiet walks to chapel service on moonlight nights. Between times there are many occasions for confidential talks, sisterly counsel and exchanging of "views," followed in the case of the young man by sudden symptoms of interest in charity-work, poetry-reading and spring styles for masculine raiment. The end of this course of gentle, moral suasion is generally "an affair of the heart" in which the recipient of all these beneficent influences is apt to have that part of his anatomy damaged.

"I never dreamed Jack thought of me in that way," she explains tearfully to a chosen confidante. "I wouldn't have had it happen for the world; I was just trying to uplift his standards."

Poor Jack, meantime, ungrateful for these efforts in his behalf, becomes a cynic for a while and looks at life through very dark glasses. Sometimes it happens that he never quite regains his lost ideal of womanhood. His standard of woman has been lowered and with it his own character has lost the first bloom of manly chivalry.

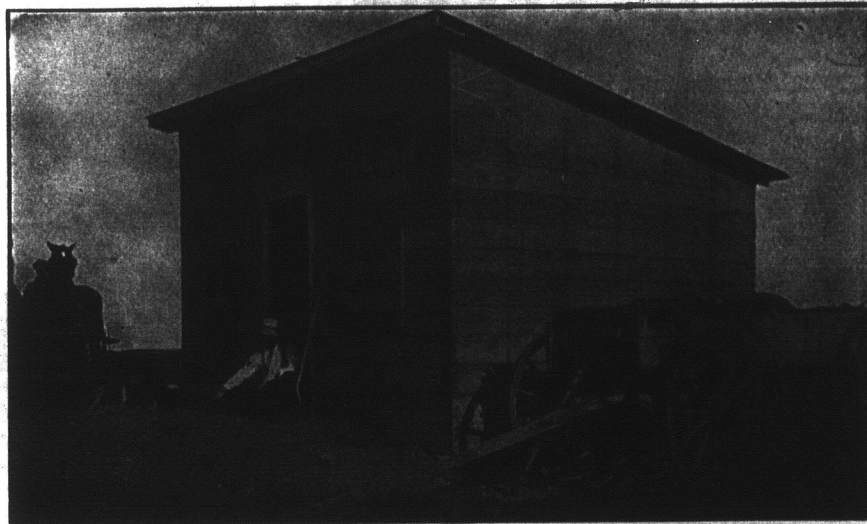
But these are really the girls with pseudo missions. There is, thank God, a mission for every girl in the world, and there are many who are earnestly doing what life brings them to do. Some of these are working out their destinies consciously, some of them unconsciously.

Sometimes one catches glimpses of girls who are fulfilling missions that they don't know anything about in the florists, or the bakers or the circulating library or on somebody's doorstep. You think you know her by the look in her eyes sometimes, and you wait a minute longer in the doorway or on the corner to hear her voice, for if the voice and eyes tell the same story, you may be sure you haven't made a mistake. This fragment of an unconsciously told life story dropped in my way not long ago. Two girls were coming up the avenue and one stopped to catch a car.

"It must be very hard for you to stay at home so closely with your mother," said one. "Don't you want to go to luncheons, or matinees, or teas?"

"Of course I do; I love luncheons and matinees and teas," said the other, "but, you see, I love mother better. I'd rather roll mother's wheel-chair out and watch her eyes brighten at the sight of the leaves and grass and flowers in the fens than to see all the Nance O'Neils in America."

That girl never thought about "having a mission" in her life, perhaps, but she was doing brightly, with no thought of sacrifice, the manifest duty that was hers to do. In another way, a girl acquaintance who was asked by the minister of her church about what she considered her duty in regard to an unfortunate friend of hers solved the problem. "Oh, dear me," she said wearily, "I don't bother about going down alleys to hunt up people who are carrying burdens, but of course if one comes down the road alongside of me, why of course I have to give her a lift. That's all the philosophy I know about it." And that was good enough.



A Homesteader's Cabin, in Western Canada.